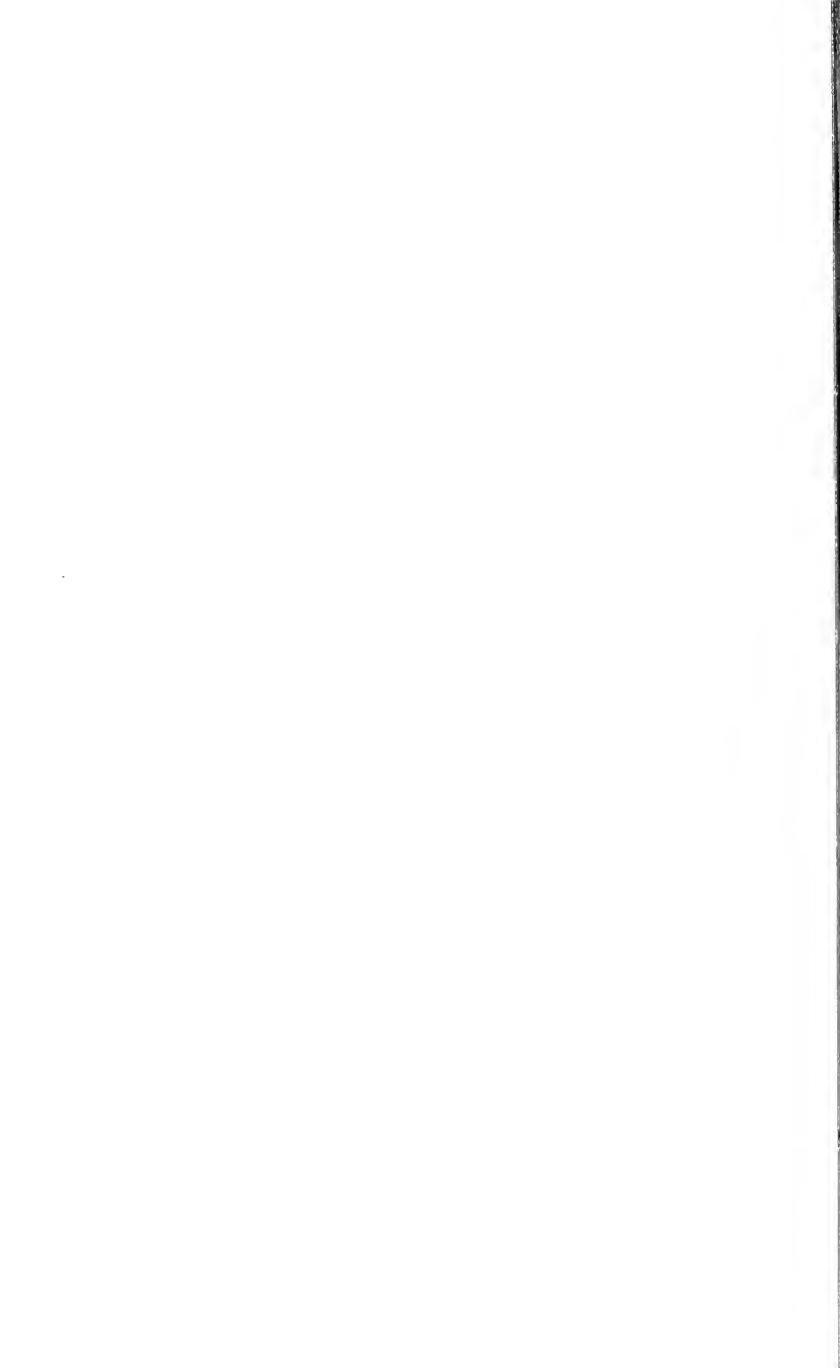


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ELGIUM AND GREECE

BY
J. W. HEADLAM

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY
PUBLISHERS IN AMERICA FOR HODDER & STOUGHTON
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BELGIUM AND GREECE

IT is not unnatural that during the last few months articles have from time to time appeared in the papers of neutral countries drawing attention to the treatment of Greece by the Allies and suggesting that this shows how little regard need really be attached to their professions that they are actuated by the respect for the rights of small States, and that they are defending law and justice against force and violence. It is suggested that when these professions are put to the proof, Great Britain and her Allies act precisely as Germany has done; we talk of the rights which belong to the weak when Belgium and Serbia are overrun by the German armies, but when a small and weak State refuses to do our bidding, it becomes apparent that we are willing to commit exactly the same crimes that we have denounced in others.

The argument is one that would appeal to simple and ingenious minds. Belgium was a neutral State and so was Greece. Belgium was a small State and so was Greece. The neutrality of Belgium was violated by the German Army, who claimed to use

the territory as a road to France. The neutrality of Greece was violated by the armies of the Allies, who claimed to use the territory in order to transfer their armies to the seat of warfare between Serbia and Bulgaria. What more could be required? Is it not evident that the Allies are guilty of that very crime which they charge against the Germans?

The argument may seem conclusive, and it would be conclusive were it not that it omits the cardinal elements on both sides. A promise, a treaty, a word of honour solemnly pledged. And, in truth, those who maintain that the conditions are similar, in the very fact that they do this, assent to the proposition that in international relations promises are empty words, treaties are scraps of paper, pledged honour is as a breath of air which flows hither and thither, purposeless, on the face of the earth. Belgium was neutral and Greece was neutral, but the neutrality of the two States was as different as black and white. For the neutrality of Belgium was the fulfilment of a solemn engagement, the neutrality of Greece was the violation of an engagement equally binding; if the one was a virtue, the other was a crime.

There has been much talk of the neutrality of Belgium. Men have written long books about it. The whole question has been encumbered by learned disquisitions on international law and The Hague Conference. The pages of the most voluminous and the most worthless of professors have been

ransacked to find arguments on one side or the other. All this is beside the point. To judge the question we require nothing but a firm grasp of those simple and universal rules of conduct which bind together old and young, learned and simple, civilised and barbarian. Had Grotius and Puffendorf and Bluntschli never lived, the issue would not be changed, and it would be much clearer. A definite and formal promise had been made by the five great Powers in Europe that Belgium should be permanently neutral. This meant, first, that they were debarred from going to war against Belgium, and, secondly, that in case of war against other States, they were debarred from using an alliance with Belgium, or using the resources of the country, or the territory of the country, in support of their armies. On this there has in fact never been the slightest shadow of doubt.

The promise might have been wise or foolish; it was open to any State to represent that it was one which under modern conditions could not be maintained, to declare that she wished to be freed from it, and to summon a conference of the guaranteeing Powers in order to arrange for an abrogation of the treaty. But if this was to be done, it must be done in time of peace. For it was characteristic of the engagement that it only became effective when the state of war had in fact arisen; then it was too late to disown it. If two men fight a duel they fight on

the agreed conventions; it is open to them before the actual struggle begins to ask that these conditions and conventions should be changed; it is not open to them without warning, when face to face with the adversary, to start the duel by a treacherous and false stroke.

So much for Belgium, but what of Greece? Here first, we note that there was no engagement on the part of any Power to respect the neutrality of Greece. According to the general principles of European relations, it was open to any State which had a serious cause of difference with Greece to make on her those demands which she required in her own interests, to embody them in an ultimatum, and, if necessary, to enforce them by war. Conduct of this kind would be judged on the particular case; it might be justifiable, it might be reprehensible; all would depend upon the questions at issue and the cause of difference. When two Powers are at war, to present demands, and, if necessary, go to war with a third Power, is in itself in no way more contrary to ordinary political convention than is the original declaration of war. Much has been talked about the rights of neutrals which is quite beside the point. The state of neutrality is not a positive, but a negative one. It means only that at a particular moment the neutral State is not party to the conflict which is in progress. It may become one at any moment, either by its own action or by

the action of either of the belligerents. Any such action should, of course, be well weighed and undertaken for serious and honourable objects. If these objects are right and sufficient, the entanglement of another State in war is not in itself something to be reproved, though it may be regretted. And there may be cases where the maintenance of neutrality is in itself a crime, just as the violation of neutrality in other cases may be a crime.

Now, how did this matter stand with Greece? Here, again, everything is really of transparent simplicity. In the year 1912, after the first Balkan war, when a quarrel arose among the allies, a fresh war broke out between Bulgaria on the one hand and Greece and Serbia on the other. In this war Greece and Serbia were successful. As a result of their successes they added each to their dominions territories to which Bulgaria had laid claim. It could easily be foreseen that when opportunity arose Bulgaria would inevitably make every effort to recover some at least of the territory that she had lost. To guard against this danger a treaty of alliance was made between Greece and Serbia. The treaty has not been published and we do not know precisely either the date on which it was concluded or its specific terms. So much, however, is known, that each of the contracting States engaged to support the other in arms in defence of its territory in the case that any attack was made upon it by Bul-

garia. By this Serbia secured, as she hoped, the firm possession of Monastir and the surrounding districts, and Greece secured Salonika and Kavalla. The treaty was a reciprocal one. Had at any time Bulgaria, as she well might have, threatened Greece with war, Greece would at once have called for the help of her ally, and we cannot doubt that the appeal would have been made and the pledge redeemed. But the circumstances arose that it was not Greece which called on the help of Serbia, but Serbia which called for the help of Greece. Bulgaria mobilised her forces, and it was shown by every indication that she proposed to throw them on the rear of the Serbian Army just at the moment when Serbia was fully occupied in defending herself against the overwhelming numbers of the Austrian invasion. Never was there a time when one State could with so good a cause summon to her assistance a pledged ally.

For, let it be noted, Greece was the only State by means of which the necessary help could be given. The Treaty of London, which in this matter had been confirmed by the Treaty of Bucharest, had denied to Serbia access to the sea. She was thereby shut off from free intercourse with the other States of Europe. She had great and powerful allies—Russia, France, Great Britain—but such was the unfortunate geographical position of the kingdom that scarcely a single soldier, much less an

organised expedition, could find his way to the threatened territory, except over the soil of Greece. It was this condition against which the Serbian nation and the Serbian statesmen had struggled, and justly struggled, in the discussions which followed the first Balkan war, for they had seen quite clearly that a Serbia which had no access to the sea would be still a Serbia subject to the caprices or the ambitions of Austria. One safeguard alone there was, and that was the alliance with Greece, for the alliance with Greece opened up the single railway by which there was connection with the sea and a great port.

And this brings us to a matter which is very pertinent to the whole question. It is customary for German writers, in comparing the German action in Belgium and the Allied action in Greece, to assert that the Germans were under the domination of what they called "*Not*," or necessity. They were driven, so they declare, under the paramount requirements of defending their national existence, to acts which might, perhaps, be condemned. They suggest that there was no such requirement in the landing at Salonika. It was a contrast which, if they were wiser, they would not have suggested. As to the invasion of Belgium we know, and they themselves now know, that there was no necessity; if it had been merely a question of a defence of the German frontier, that could have been carried

through with equal ease on the line from Limbourg to Switzerland. But that which they mean by necessity was not the protection of Germany, but the crushing of France. It was an illustration of the German way of calling the annihilation of an enemy mere self-protection.

What hypocrisy it is! The invasion of Belgium was not a device suddenly adopted in a moment of justifiable panic; it was a plan long conceived, carefully matured, worked out by the German General Staff, and it was because they had this plan that they ventured to defy Europe and appeal to arms in a matter which was easily capable of settlement by agreement.

But how do matters stand with Serbia? Here there was a case which justifies the use of the word "necessity." Serbia was attacked on the north by the superior forces of the Austrian Army, on the east and the south by their Bulgarian allies. Against these superior forces she could not maintain herself. She had as allies three of the greatest Powers of the world, but their alliance was useless to her unless there could be established a free communication for ammunition and troops. But the persistent enmity of Austria had always refused Serbia access to the sea; the small inland State was shut off from the outer world by high mountains and wild passes; there was only one road by which aid could reach her, and that was from Salonika

through Greek territory. If we look at the matter from the point of view of Serbia, this will at once show us that the Treaty with Greece was not an accidental and unimportant thing; it was in truth the very condition of her existence. Were the road through Greece which had thus been secured to her closed, she could look for nothing but the annihilation which has, in fact, fallen upon her. It is true that the *necessity* was not that of Russia or France or England, it was that of Serbia; we can understand that the Germans would not recognise that a small State opposed to themselves, which had for long been marked out for destruction, should be reckoned in the matter at all, but for the Allies there was a paramount and overwhelming necessity, that of doing all in their power for the salvation of Serbia.

The application, therefore, was made by Serbia in the height of her peril, at the very crisis of her existence as an independent State, to her Greek ally. The application was made, and it was refused. It was, perhaps, the most dastardly refusal of which there is any record in history, a refusal sufficient to justify a demand that the nation which was guilty of it should be struck out of the society of civilised States.

When the refusal was made it would have been open to Serbia to call for the help and countenance of Britain, France, and Russia, to lay before them

the case, and to ask that, as allies, they should support her request with the strongest diplomatic representations, and that, in the case that the refusal was persisted in, they should declare war upon Greece, reduce the country to subjection, and treat the territory as that of an occupied and conquered adversary. Against this not a word could be said on the ground of convention or of law or of morality.

It will perhaps have been better had they acted thus. What they did was something infinitely milder, and it showed their desire in every way to spare Greece the horrors of warfare. There are cases, and this perhaps is one, in which consideration becomes a blunder and leniency becomes a crime. All that they asked was that, while Greece herself might remain neutral, the armies of the Allies should be allowed to use the port of Salonika and the railway for the conveyance of troops to the assistance of the Serbians, who were now engaged in a hopeless struggle against overwhelming forces attacking them on three sides.

This they asked, and in this Greece tacitly acquiesced. More than this they have never asked. They have not required from Greece that active co-operation to which they were entitled. The situation which arose was indeed an unusual and an awkward one. A portion of Greek soil was used as a base by foreign Powers in a war against States with which Greece herself was at peace. But this situa-

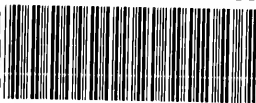
tion arose entirely from the first refusal of Greece to fulfil her obligations. And, given the existence of this situation, with what extraordinary consideration have the Allies handled it! For many months they left the full civil administration of Salonika in the hands of the Greek Government; they did not even proclaim martial law and take the full control into their own hands until Greece had shown by numerous acts that she was working in secret agreement with Germany, Austria, and Bulgaria. Greek territory was being used (of this there is abundant proof) to provide supplies for the German and Austrian submarines; Salonika was full of spies and there was constant communication with the Central Powers; it was seriously proposed to interfere with the communications of the Allies, if not by open warfare, at least by the encouragement of popular risings. Fort Rupel, one of the strongest fortifications erected in modern times, holding an important strategical position and dominating the Valley of the Struma, was surrendered practically without resistance to the Germans; a Greek army corps was handed over to them with all its provisions and munitions of warfare. Was it to be expected that the Allies would acquiesce in the continuation of such a state of things? What ground is there for complaint that at last—and, as many will be inclined to think, after undue procrastination—pressure was

brought on the Greek Government and the Greek people by the method of a blockade?

When the full account of these events is written, it will, I think, appear that never in the history of the world has a State been treated with such consideration, for it must always be remembered that, owing to her geographical position, Greece and her capital were entirely at the mercy of the Allies. It has been said that they tried to force Greece to join in the war. This is untrue. As we have seen, they would have been completely and absolutely justified in pursuing such a course. They did not; from beginning to end they have demanded nothing except the use of Macedonia for military purposes and honest neutrality on the part of Greece.

What, in fact, we have in the case of Greece is not the ruthless abuse of force on the part of the Allies. It is quite the reverse—a small State presuming on the consideration which she knew that she would receive just because of her own weakness, and, trading on the long-established interest which France and England had shown her, using her position to violate her treaties and to commit acts of scarcely veiled hostility, on which no great Power would ever have ventured.

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